Digitalization policy and digital exclusion

Problem representation in Swedish digitalization policy and
its effects to digital exclusion

Emma Törnblom

Abstract

As being digital increasingly becomes a requirement for functioning in society, those who are not as digital increasingly become excluded. This study aims to problematize the Swedish policies surrounding digitalization, and especially those in some way related to digital exclusion. The paper uses a combination of Bacchi's *What's represented as the problem?* methodology and theories on the neoliberal rationality in order to ask questions about the problematizations in Swedish digitalization policy, the underlying logics behind them and their effects on digital exclusion. The conclusion is drawn that Swedish digitalization policy possesses elements that affect digital exclusion by, among other things, limiting scope of what can be done about it. Further, the analysis shows that patterns of neoliberal rationality is present throughout much of the digitalization policy and the conclusion is drawn that this has impact on digital exclusion.

Key words: digitalization, digital exclusion, policy analysis, WPR, governmentality, neoliberalism

Words: 9428

Table of contents

1   Introduction

There is a wide spread perception that new web-based technologies are changing the relationship between government and citizens though a number of trends. These involve public sector organizations transforming into 'digital agencies', a movement towards citizens being increasingly involved in the "co-production of outputs through electronic processes" and citizens having "access to their administrative files and electronic possibilities to intervene in the process" (Buffat, 2015, p. 150). In Sweden, such transformations are visible among several state agencies. For instance, the Swedish tax-agency now has a number of available online services and has a goal for 2018-2020 to further the digitalization of their processes (Skatteverket 2017, p. 8).

The goal of public sector digitalization is now to fundamentally reshape how the state interacts with citizens and companies rather than just use digital blankets instead of paper ones (Myndigheten för digital förvaltning 1, 2019). These days, you can handle your taxes, pension savings and many other welfare services digitally. As this rapid change is happening, the people that are not following along in the development fall increasingly far behind. I personally became interested in this research subject as I witnessed older relatives having difficulty adjusting to new demands of digital identification in order to access medical journals or handle banking. This sparked questions about how digitalization has resulted in different effects for different groups of people. For the people who have followed along in the development, the experience might be a simpler everyday life with less time spent on things like paying taxes, which used to be very time-consuming. But for people who have a hard time adjusting to a digital society, increased digitalization can result in increased exclusion.

In this paper, the relationship between government policy and digital exclusion is seen to be of great importance. In order to ask critical questions about the ways in which the framing of 'problems' facing digitalization policy and the effect this has on digital exclusion, a methodology of the *What's the problem represented to be?* approach developed by Carol Bacchi will be used (2009).

The text is structured such that first, a short background will be given to provide context (primarily to the question of digital exclusion) before the purpose and research questions are elaborated on. In the following parts, method and theory will be presented. Then, the results of the analysis will be presented before the main points are summarized in the conclusion.

2 Background

2.1 Research on policy effects from other countries

As the research on the effects of digitalization policy is a relatively young field, there is a limited amount of research done in the Swedish context. Before focusing on the research on Sweden, we can perhaps learn something from research conducted in our neighboring countries where there has been similar trends. Especially as Denmark, Sweden and Norway all score high on the EU index of digital performance in society and economy (DESI 2018), indicating that they have all experienced a high level of digitalization of society.

One Norwegian study focused on the welfare users' experience of the shift from a primarily face-to-face encounters (street-level bureaucracy) to more and more screen-to-screen encounters (screen-level bureaucracy) (Hansen, et al., 2018). The research can provide useful input as the same trend towards less street-level bureaucracy can be seen in Sweden (Jansson & Erlingsson, 2014). The study found that ICT developments in the public sector can contribute to "the feeling of becoming lost in the system and not being treated as a real person" and, according to the authors, the Norwegian case shows "the great difficulties in adopting ICT in the welfare field" (Hansen, et al., 2018, p. 85).

Focusing on Denmark, the book *Digitalization and Public Sector Transformation* takes a critical view of digitalization and how it came to be so widely adapted. Among the findings the authors concluded:

> At least in a Danish context, digitalization has slowly, but surely, been enrolled and mobilized as part of a broader state project aimed at transforming and restructuring the welfare state into a competition state. (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018, p. 112)

The book also describes how digital public sector self-service solutions have effectively delegated tasks that used to be carried out by welfare state professionals to citizens themselves. The authors calls this a process of gradual *responsibilization* as self-service technologies "are a means of making citizens do more for themselves, carrying out tasks that were previously handled by the state" (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018, p. 90). Additionally, the conclusion is made that to be considered a proper citizen in the normative sense "increasingly implies being able to utilize digital technologies in order to communicate and interact with the state" (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018, p. 112). "The state expects its citizenry to be digital, as being digital is increasingly considered the unquestionable, desirable and necessary form of

citizen-subjectivity" (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018, p. 113). The Danish case is arguably very different in many ways from the Swedish case. The Danish government has long had a very proactive digital agenda that includes legal measures (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018, p. 61), efforts to which there is no counterpart in Sweden. However, both this study and the Norwegian study touch on how those who are not up to speed with changes related to new technology are treated (or at least feel like they are treated) as lesser-than. This is of interest to the Swedish case as the paper will argue that similar trends of responsibilization and expectations are present in Swedish policy as well.

2.2 Previous research on Swedish digitalization policy

Sweden's first official policies on the information society – which would evolve into digitalization policies – date back to the mid-1990s (Hall, 2008, p. 9). An analysis of policies from this time came to the conclusion that a "basic underpinning idea embedded in the Swedish ICT-political discourse is that the 'knowledge society' is not shaped by human actors, but by intangible forces." (Hall & Löfgren, 2004, p. 154). ICT is a shortening of Information and Communication Technology, and ICT-policy exists under the umbrella of digitalization policy. The quote is from a critical analysis of the ICT commission's report from 1998, a document that was very significant for the ICT-political discourse at the time (Hall & Löfgren, 2004, p. 154). Discourse-analysis from the late 90s to early 00s found that individuals were constructed as "either helpless, possibly opposing, or as subjects for education, retraining, and adaptation" and that the "subjects that are 'acting' within the discourse are all intangible: the future; the information society; the digital society; the new reality; the new world, or merely 'the new'" (Hall & Löfgren, 2004, p. 155). In the later parts of the 2000s, analysis of the discourse has – among other things – found trends of increased focus on economic, nationalistic and sustainability goals. (Hall, 2008, p. 41). In summary, the analysis sees a shift in ICT-policy discourse towards a more multidimensional definition of the information society, at the same time as neoliberal logic has continued to grow in importance (Hall, 2008, p. 42).

2.2.1 Digital exclusion in Sweden

Having access to internet used to be operationalized as the determining factor for whether a person was digitally included or not. The gap between those who use the internet and those who do not has been called the *digital divide*. This has been met by criticism for being unable to capture real divide, as internet related knowledge and skill has significance for how well technology is used (Abalo & Danielsson,

2008, p. 41). One way to add some nuance is to measure the amount of internet use as an indicator of digital inclusion.

Data from 2018 presented by *Internetstiftelsen* shows that 1,1 million Swedes to not use the internet daily (IIS, 2018, p. 21). It also showed that this is more common among those who are older (the most significant factor), live in a rural area, have a lower household income or a lower education level. It also showed that people who do not use the internet daily feel like they participate in the digital society to a much lesser extent. When people who never use the internet were asked the primary reason for not using the internet by far the most common answer (from a set of alternatives) was "Lack of interest/not usable" (47%) followed by "Complicated technology/don't know how" (24%) (IIS, 2018, p. 27).

An empirical study with data from Sweden and Great Britain puts emphasis on the link between social divides and what the authors call *digital exclusion.* The research showed that "overall [Internet] non-users in Sweden and Britain are increasingly older, less educated, more likely to be unemployed, disabled, and socially isolated." (Helsper & Reisdorf, 2017, p. 1267). The researchers found that during the years 2005 to 2013 in Sweden, the group of Internet non-users had shrunk and "become concentrated among the severely socio-economically and socially vulnerable" (Helsper & Reisdorf, 2017, p. 1266). Even though this data solely focuses on digital exclusion operationalized as Internet use, it does tell us something about the relationship between digitalization and the societal context it exists in. Additionally, it can be argued that this brings further leverage to the importance of studying digitalization policy related to social exclusion, as it disproportionately affect already marginalized people in society.

Focusing on ICT literacy (the ability to use available ICT resources) and access to ICT among senior citizens in Sweden, another study found that there is an overly optimistic belief in the possibilities of digitalization when it comes to the aging population (Olsson, et al., 2019, p. 57). According to the authors, this is especially problematic because they argue that digital exclusion among older people is not only related to generation, as age is also an important factor (Olsson, et al., 2019, p. 68). The authors argue that one if the explanations for this is that ICT-literacy is unlike conventional literacy in that it requires continuous learning and updating, something that becomes harder to do with age (Olsson, et al., 2019, p. 68).

3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this paper is to study what ideas rule Swedish digitalization policy and how this might affect digital exclusion. As was illustrated in the background, research has shown that even if a person has access to and uses the internet, the variation in how well people can utilize digital resources can leave those less capable becoming excluded from digital society. In order to avoid the connotation of a divide being based on physical access to the internet, *digital exclusion* will instead be used to describe the socially excluding effects of not being able to utilize digital information and services.

This paper will heavily rely on the *What's the problem represented to be*? (WPR) approach developed by political scientist Carol Bacchi (2009), both in formulating the research question and the methodology used to answer it. The principal idea behind the WPR approach is that by analyzing the underlying logics behind policy, instead of viewing them as solutions to problems that exist outside of politics, a critical reading can create possibilities to ask questions about the reasoning behind problem representations and their effects (Bacchi, 2009). In other words, only by revealing the underlying logics of policy can assumptions that the policy relies on be questioned.

Previous research shows that there has been a shift in Swedish digitalization policy towards more neoliberal logic (Hall, 2008; Hall & Löfgren, 2004). Because of this, a second purpose of this paper is to see if such neoliberal rationality can be found in the more recent digitalization policies as well, and if so, to analyze how this relates to the issue of digital exclusion. For this purpose, theory on neoliberal governmentality and citizenship is used.

In this paper, the following research questions will be asked:

What are the problems represented to be in Swedish digitalization policy and what are the implications of this problematization on digital exclusion?

- *Can neoliberal rationality be found in said policy, and if so, what are the implications of this on digital exclusion?*

The second question should, rather than a totally separate question, be thought of as a sub-question to the first one. Both questions will be dealt with throughout the analysis and the findings will be summarized in the conclusion.

4   Method and material

4.1   Policy as discourse – *What's the Problem Represented to be?*

"WPR is an analytic strategy that puts in question the common view that the role of government is to solve problems that sit outside them, waiting to be 'addressed'." (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 14). In other words, this approach can be used to theorize about things that are otherwise often assumed to be true through studying the ways in which a *problem* is produced and represented.

Rather than taking a linguistic turn when analyzing discourse, the WPR approach aims at unveiling forms of governing and associated effects through texts. (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 18). As a tool for analysis, the approach uses the application of six questions that are displayed in picture 1 below.

Before going deeper into the methodology of the WPR approach, it is worth noting that the WPR approach also involves theory about how we are governed and how we can learn about the ways in which we are governed. However, in the hope being widely applicable the WPR approach is by design made simple enough to apply without delving deeper into complicated theoretical underpinnings (Bacchi, 2009, p. xxi). With this in mind, there should post no problem to use the WPR approach for the purpose of a method rather than as theory.

At least in this case, adhering to all six of the WPR questions will involve overlap and cause some repetition in the analysis. However, following them in a looser way serves as no problem as "their listing as separate 'steps' serves as a heuristic function and ought to be treated accordingly" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 19).There is no conflict in being selective when choosing the form of analysis and questioning raised by WRP for practical application as long as "a self-problematizing ethic is maintained" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 24). With this in mind and given the limited scope of this paper, the analysis will focus on questions 1, 2, 4 and 5. These questions are chosen because, as their elaborations in the following sections will show, the first question lays the groundwork for the analysis, the second question provides tools for deeper analysis, the fourth question asks left unproblematic, and the fifth question deals with the effects of the findings in previous questions. In the following sections, each of these questions will be explained further and their associated analytical tools explained.

Picture 1 (Source: Bacchi 2009 in Bacchi & Goodwin 2016, p. 20)

4.1.1 Question 1: What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?

The analysis in this question can be said to lay the ground for the rest of the questions, although the question itself is mostly an exercise in clarification (Bacchi, 2009, pp. 2-3). Given that policies often consist of a range of proposals there can be multiple – at times conflicting and even contradicting – problem representations within them and when this is the case special attention should be payed (Bacchi, 2009, p. 4). When confronted with such tension it is important to acknowledge the interpretive dimension of the analytic process and – as with text selection – avoid choosing only those segments that support an interpretation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 20).

4.1.2 Question 2: What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underline this representation of the "problem"?

This question is where the analysis really begins. When looking for *presumptions* or *assumptions* that the problem representation builds, the idea is to look at epistemological and ontological assumptions and/or presumptions that support a "background 'knowledge' that is taken-for granted" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5). Bacchi makes an important distinction here;

> The kind of analysis recommended for Question 2 does not elicit the assumptions or beliefs *held by policy makers.* We are not interested in attempting to identify biases, for example. Rather the task is to identify the assumptions and/or presumptions that *lodge within problem representations.* (Emphasis in original) (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5)

8

In other words, when analyzing the logics present in the policies at hand, the purpose is not to reveal something about policy makers producing the policies, but about revealing the underlying logics that the policies themselves are rooted in. This also means that no effort will be made to take into consideration who wrote a specific policy, their possible bias or other factors, as this is beside the point of this type of analysis.

This question is about illuminating the worldview that lies behind a specific problem representation as an exercise in Foucauldian archaeology (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5). There can be patterns in the ways in which 'problems' are thought about, which are sometimes called governmental rationalities by scholars of governmentality. There are conflicting understandings about how to categorize governmental rationalities and when met with such Bacchi adopts the position that "emphasises the simultaneous coexistence of various forms of rule, which are often hybrid" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7).

Policies are elaborated in discourse, and discourse is here thought of as more than language, rather, it represents a meaning system (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7). As a tool in analyzing discourse, Bacchi suggests paying special attention to binaries, *key concepts* and *categories*. Binaries because they can reveal "the operation of conceptual logic that may act to constrain or limit our understanding of an issue" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7). Key concepts because they are "relatively open-ended" and therefore often contested by competing political visions trying to install them with different meanings (Bacchi, 2009, p. 8). Categories, especially people categories such as 'elderly' or 'citizens', because of their centrality to governing processes (Bacchi, 2009, p. 8).

4.1.3 Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ´problem´ be thought about differently?

Analysis aims to put to problematizations to critical scrutiny. Ways to do this include asking questions about limits in the underlying problem representations and about what fails to be problematized due to them. The objective is to highlight issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representations (Bacchi, 2009, p. 12). "The argument here is not simply that there is another way to think about the issue but that specific policies are constrained by the ways in which they represent the 'problem'." (Bacchi, 2009, p. 12). This question will rely on the results of the previous WPR questions.

4.1.4 Question 5: What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

In the WPR approach, assessment of effects does not include traditional measures of 'outcomes'. Rather, effects are understood as much more subtle forms of influence. Bacchi makes the case that problem representation can impact different

groups of people unevenly, and therefore offers three ways to 'test' the operation of problem representation: discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects. (Bacchi, 2009, p. 40)

Discursive effects follow from the limits imposed on what can be thought and said. "The proposal is simple. If some options for social intervention are closed off by the way in which a 'problem' is represented, this can have devastating effects for certain people." (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16).

Subjectification effects are a bit abstract and basically build on the idea that discourse in policy make certain subject positions available in a set construction of social relationships. Special scrutiny should be appointed to a dynamic Foucault calls 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982, in Bacchi, 2009, p. 16). This dynamic can play out in policy discourse as problem representations setting up groups of people in opposition to each other, such as the 'employed' *versus* the 'unemployed' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16).

Lastly, lived effects are "the material impact of problem representation on bodies and lives" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 40). These effects are perhaps the most tangible, as they refer to material impact of problem representation: "If access to resources depends upon one's location within welfare categories, for example, the premises underpinning the grounds for categorization can mean lack of food and/or inadequate housing." (Bacchi, 2009, p. 18). These types of effects are out of the scope of this paper as the interpretation is made that answering them would demand collection of empirical data and/or there being data available that can indicate lived material effects of digital exclusion, of which none has been found.

4.2 Material

The objective of this paper is to analyze digitalization policy in order to ask questions about the problem representation(s) in them and how they affect digital exclusion. In order to do this, a selection of official documents central to current digitalization policy produced by the Swedish government been selected as study material. The material includes reports, strategies, directives, legislation and different related documents. The use of a variety of policy related material is promoted in the WPR approach, since it is often needed in order to get a more complete picture of a particular problem representation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 20). Below, an overview of key the selected documents is presented.

In 2015, the Commission on Digitalization presented an Official Report of the Swedish Government called *The transformative force of Digitalization – choices for the future*[1] (SOU 2015:91). This was presented as a very a thorough investigation. In the report, the current situation is described, its challenges and opportunities, and preferred steps for the future are presented. In 2017, a

---

[1] Most of the material are documents originally written in Swedish. When these are is referred to or cited they have throughout the text been translated to English by me. For elaboration of this choice, see section 4.3.

Digitalization Strategy (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017) was presented by the government and further elaborated in the governments text *How Sweden becomes the best in the world at using the possibilities of digitalization – a letter on the direction of politics* (Skr. 2017/18:47). These documents talk about digitalization from an overall objective on digitalization policy, as opposed to documents on specific policy implementations.

The nature of public sector digitalization policy is such that it involves multiple conventional areas of the public sector. The Digitalization Strategy divides digitalization policy into five categories with respective sub-goal: (1) digital competence, digital safety, digital innovation, digital leadership and digital infrastructure (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 11). The sub-goal of *Digital Competence* is described as: "In Sweden, everyone will be able to develop and use their digital competence" (Skr. 2017/18:47, p. 8; Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 12). This goal is seen as closely related to the issue of digital participation by the parliamentary committee responsible for ICT questions (bet. 2017/18:TU9, p. 14). With this in mind, the decision has been made to look more closely at policies related to the sub-goal of digital competence as an operationalizing of targeting policies related to digital exclusion (digital participation being understood as the opposite of digital exclusion).

The new law on accessibility to digital public sector services (SFS 2018:1937) and related regulation (SFS 2018:1938) is listed among efforts to reach the digital competence on the government official website (Regeringskansliet, 2018)**.** The law, which came to effect January 1st, 2019, follows EU Directive 2016/2102 (Directive (EU) 2016/2102) and requires digital public sector services to be accessible for everyone. The legislation is very new, which both adds a level of relevance but at the same time leaves the effects of the law to speculation as it is yet to result in any actual documented repercussions or change. However, as the purpose of this paper is to analyze the underlying 'truths' that policy relies on and the effects of certain problem representations, rather than evaluate policy outcomes, this is not seen as a problem. Further, it should be mentioned that the EU directive that predates the Swedish law will be included in parts of the analysis even though it is not a Swedish policy document. However, this is only done to facilitate analysis of how this directive is interpreted in different Swedish policy documents.

4.3   Limitations to the method and clarification

This paper is a policy analysis interested in the social and cultural implications of how problems are framed. Digitalization policy deals with a range of different areas and selection of relevant parts of the policy had to be made based on the research purpose. Therefore, one limitation of this paper is that it only seeks to analyze the parts of digitalization policy interpreted as central to how digitalization is conceptualized overall, or more closely related to the issue of digital exclusion in some way.

The decision is made to limit the material to a selection of the more recent important policy documents spanning from 2015 to 2019. This results in a lack of historical context for the policies and the analysis will not be able to spot change in the discourse over time, nor is that the objective of this paper. The aim of this study is not to give a description of how digitalization policy has evolved, rather the aim is to problematize the problem representation(s) as they are today and raise questions about the effects that has in the current Swedish context.

One potential danger for the reliability of this kind of analysis is the author only selecting the parts of a material that supports what the author wants to find. Conscious effort is made to avoid this by including parts that contradict each other and try to give a nuanced retelling of the material. Use of a WPR approach is thought to bring a level of objectivity as it provides clear guidance for what to look for when reading the material.

One could argue that choosing theories on neoliberalism as a perspective after previous research has already proven its existence in policy does not bring much more to the field. However, I have not found research that takes the angle of what neoliberal citizenship or how neoliberal rationalities effect digital exclusion. Further, the relevance of the method is increased by some of the policy material being so new that little analysis has been done based on them. Therefore, this research is believed to contribute to the political science field as well as have relevancy for the world outside of academia.

In order to structure the analysis in a comprehensive way, the analysis structured according to the selected WPR questions in the order they appear as written by Bacchi. However, under the respective WPR questions the analysis is sometimes divided based on the material and what the analysis has found across the material. The hope is to structure the analysis in the most natural way according to what kind of text is produced under the each selected WPR question.

Lastly, all official Swedish policy material were originally written in Swedish and when references are made (including direct citations). I have translated them to English, which might result in some nuance being lost. However, because the analysis tries to illustrate larger trends rather point out deviations or specific choices of words, this is not thought to be a problem for the outcome of the analysis.

5   Theory

As mentioned in a previous section, theories on new forms on neoliberal governmentality and citizenship will be used as a theoretical framework for the analysis related to the second (sub) question about the relationship between neoliberal rationality and digital exclusion. A relevant theory for this paper should have the potential explanations as to why a society is governed in the way it is and what effects that can have on groups and individuals in society. These theories are thought to possess such explanatory potential as they provide analytical tools to spot patterns of neoliberal political rationalities and theories on what these rationalities can lead to. Further, they are needed to answer the second research question, which specifically relates to the influence of neoliberal rationality.

5.1   Neoliberal governmentality

Governmentality refers to the thinking behind, the rationalities, for different styles of governing (Bacchi, 2009, p. 6). Neoliberalism, according to Foucault, is characterized by a 'government at a distance' form of rule through the setting of desired behaviour that involve people in self-regulation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 29). Neoliberalism is sometimes seen as a set of free market policies that dismantle the welfare state. However, in order to comprehend the political and cultural effects of neoliberalism, Wendy Brown argues it is better understood as a political rationality that involves organization of the social, the subject and the state (2006, p. 693).

Built on a Foucauldian view on neoliberal governmentality, Brown describes that the first defining feature of neoliberalism, as opposed to liberalism, is that it "depicts free markets, free trade, and entrepreneurial rationality as achieved and normative, as promulgated through law and through social and economic policy – not simply as occurring by dint of nature." (Brown, 2006, p. 694). Second, neoliberalism sees that market concerns should dominate the social and political sphere and their organization should be based on market rationality. "That is, more than simply facilitating the economy, the state itself must construct and construe itself in market terms, as well as develop policies and promulgate a political culture that figures citizens exhaustively as rational economic actors in every sphere of life." (Brown, 2006, p. 694). Third, neoliberal political rationality also produces governance criteria along the lines of productivity and profitability, among other things resulting in increased similarities to 'market speak' in governance talk (Brown, 2006, p. 694).

According to Mitchell Dean, those that do not follow desired behavior in a neoliberal regime and do not possess characteristics necessary for "bearing the

freedoms and responsibilities of a citizen" are subjected to a broad range of interventions and "[to] avoid the forms of exclusion and punishment meted out to these groups, the 'free subject of liberalism' comes to regulate their own behaviours (*self*-regulation)" (Dean, 1999 in Bacchi, 2009, p. 29).

5.2   Neoliberal citizenship

Brown points to implications of neoliberalism on citizenship in that neoliberalism rationality leads to the development and promotion of political culture and policies that figure and produce citizens as rational economic actors in every sphere of life. Further, citizens are seen as consumers whose "moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care'" (Brown, 2006, p. 694).

For the purpose of this paper, the effects on citizenship deserves special attention. Through reviewing relevant literature on the subject, Woolford and Nelund elaborate on the effects of neoliberalism on citizenship and discern the following five characteristics of the ideal neoliberal citizen. The ideal neoliberal citizen (1) is active, (2) manages risk carefully, (3) is a responsible person capable of self-management, self-governance and making reasonable choices (a shift from social to private responsibility), (4) is not reliable on social services for survival, is instead an autonomous, self-reliant, and empowered agent, and (5) is and entrepreneur of self, who can maximize his or her personal interests, well-being, and quality of life, through self-promotion and competition (Woolford & Nelund, 2013, p. 304).

Woolford and Nelund argue that under neoliberal restructuring, the responsible subject is one who requires little state intervention and "in the bureaucratic field this conception is both a means for evaluating the effectiveness of and a desired objective for social service programs" (Woolford & Nelund, 2013, p. 305). This means that in a neoliberal society, success is thought of in terms of as little state involvement in service users lives as possible, and thus citizens requiring a lot of intervention are an obstacle to success.

6 Results

6.1 What's the problem represented to be?

The first question of the WPR approach is meant to give a clarification of what the problem is represented to be in a policy and lay the groundwork for the more analytical parts of the later questions. Policies often relate to implied problems, which is why a clarification of what the problem is represented to be is needed (Bacchi, 2009, pp. ix-x).

6.1.1 Digitalization policy

One way in which the 'problem' facing digitalization policy is represented is rooted in the view that Sweden has to be a competitive country and therefor maximally utilize digitalization. The central goal stated in the Digitalization Strategy is "Sweden will be the best in the world at using the possibilities of digitalization". When elaborated on, digitalization is thought to be able to contribute to "competitiveness, full employment and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development" (2017, p. 6). In the Chairman's preface of the report by the Commission on Digitalization, further digitalization is argued for in order to avoid becoming a "mediocracy" in the EU (2015, p. 13). Here, it is understood that Sweden should to regain its position as one of the worlds most digitalized and developed countries. Thus, one 'problem' that the policy creates can be described as a perception that Sweden no longer has the conditions needed to compete internationally. Here, there is a domination of market concerns, use of words like *competitiveness* associated with market talk and a construction the world as a competitive market. This is all line with what is expected in a neoliberal governmentality (Brown, 2006, p. 694).

The Digitalization Strategy is also motivated for on the bases of contributing to social and environmental *sustainability* (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, pp. 6-9). The vision presented in the strategy is a "sustainable digitalized Sweden" and the policy as a whole is meant to contribute to this vision (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 8). Hence, another 'problem' in Swedish digitalization policy is represented as a threat of unsustainability.

In the Digitalization Strategy, the sub-goal *Digital Competence* is formulated as: "[i]n Sweden, everyone will be able to develop and use their digital competence"

(Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 12). Digital competence is explained as involving both the technical skill needed to use digital tools and services as well as the media and information knowledge needed to "find, analyze, critically assess and create information in different media and platforms" (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 12). Further, digital competence is also described as the ability to follow along in digital development in a way that creates possibility for employment, starting companies or strengthening companies' competitiveness (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 12). In other areas of digitalization policy, the lack of digital inclusion (which demands digital competence) is described as a problem for the overall goal of utilizing the possibilities of digitalization (Digitaliseringsrådet, 2018, pp. 7, 12). The problem represented to face digital competence can therefore be described as a twofold threat of people not being included in digital society and therefore creating obstacles for the overall goal of utilizing the possibilities of digitalization.

The Committee on Traffic explicitly draws the link between the goal of Digital Competence and the issue of digital participation. In the letter under the headline *Digital participation* it reads:

> With regards to the issue of digital participation in society, the Committee would like to point out that one of the sub-goals of the Digitalization Strategy is digital competence, which means that everyone must be familiar with digital tools and services and have the ability to follow and participate in the digital development based on their conditions. (bet. 2017/18:TU9, p. 14)

In the above excerpt, one 'problem' that the Digital Competence policy is to address is related to the issue of digital participation in society. Later in the text statistics of internet use among different age groups are presented and the following concluding remark is made: "The Committee can thus satisfactorily note that the survey shows that digital divide is steadily shrinking in Sweden." (bet. 2017/18:TU9, p. 20). Although the Committee highlights a lessened digital divide, they also point out that other surveys have – aside form age – made the connection between variation in a person's digital competence and their socioeconomic position and whether they are foreign-born (bet. 2017/18:TU9, p. 15). Further, it is later declared that "the oldest in society and people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities are groups that face certain challenges when it comes to becoming digitally participant" (bet. 2017/18:TU9, p. 15). Here, the problem represented to face digital competence not only includes a lack of digital participation, but an unevenly distributed participation among certain marginalized groups in society. However, as this was the only instance where it was found that such clear connections were made, it not understood to be central to the understanding of digital competence in digitalization policy as a whole.

6.1.2 Digital accessibility legislation

The Swedish law about digital accessibility to government website and services (SFS 2018:1937) followed an EU directive from 2016. In the EU directive, under *Article 1 - Subject matter and scope,* the first point reads:

In order to improve the functioning of the internal market, this Directive aims to approximate the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to the accessibility requirements of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies, thereby enabling those websites and mobile applications to be more accessible to users, in particular to persons with disabilities. (Directive (EU) 2016/2102)

In the EU directive, multiple threats to the functioning of the internal market are specified as grounds for implementing the directive (Directive (EU) 2016/2102, pp. 1-2). However, there are also arguments based on goals of inclusiveness and accessibility, especially to those with disability (Directive (EU) 2016/2102, pp. 3-5). The importance of accessibility and inclusiveness is to increase the potential of the internal market, to remove barriers that prevent people with disability from participating in society and to accelerate the digital transformation of society (Directive (EU) 2016/2102, pp. 2-3). The central goal of the directive can be described as the optimal conditions for the functioning of the internal market, which is also the interpretation in a memorandum by the Ministry of Finance (Ds 2017:60, p. 35). In conclusion then, the EU directive and the interpretation of it by the Swedish Ministry of Finance builds on the problem represented to be a threat of not creating optimal conditions for a functional internal market. This can be said to be an example of a policy that is built on the idea that markets needs intervention in order function properly, which is a defining characteristic of neoliberal rationality (Brown, 2006, p. 694).

The memorandum by the Ministry of Finance also describes that the implementation of the digital accessibility directive will have "positive social effects as more people are included in the digital society". The memorandum continues to ascribe great value to the self-governing aspect the directive will bring: "Being able to handle one's own business and be able to influence one's own life to a greater extent is ascribed great value. It is an aspect that that also leads to positive economic consequences, as where applicable, the need for personal assistance is lowered" (Ds 2017:60, p. 125). Being self-governing is one of the characteristics of the ideal neoliberal citizen (Woolford & Nelund, 2013, p. 304) and therefore its promotion and is worth noting.

In contrast to findings above, in the memorandum by the Agency for Digital Governance the objective of the EU directive is described as harmonizing the laws and regulations of member states and that way make them more accessible for users, especially people with disabilities (Myndigheten för digital förvaltning 2, 2019, p. 6). The memorandum does mention objectives related to the internal market. This interpretation shifts focus from arguments with economic motivation to those with social motivation and the main problem representation can here be formulated as a threat of digital services being inaccessible to people, diminishing digital participation. Here, different problem representations are present that might result in different ideas of how a policy should be implemented. Likewise, if the 'problem' facing digital accessibility policy is failure of the internal market then measurements of success are likely different than if the 'problem' is seen as a lack of digital participation.

6.2   What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underline this representation of the "problem"?

The second question of the WPR approach is about understanding what is taken-for-granted in problem representations, to uncover assumptions and/or presumptions that the policy is built on. The WPR approach suggests tree tools of finding underpinning assumptions/presuppositions: looking for binaries, key concepts and categories. Bacchi also talks about there being patterns in styles of problematization. These patterns are sometimes called governmental or political rationalities, and the neoliberal is often named as one of the most prominent in recent decades (Bacchi, 2009, p. 6). Underlying logics that follow this mentality can be found in digitalization policy, which the following analysis will show. The findings under this question will then be further analyzed under question five.

As previously mentioned, key concepts refer to "abstract labels that are relatively open-ended" in the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009, p. 8), and *digitalization* is arguably the primary key concept in digitalization policy. In digitalization policy, digitalization is described as an external force that we, as a society, can only adapt ourselves to. For example, it is described that we are finding ourselves in a societal development where "digitalization is the catalyst, the enabler and the motor" (SOU 2015:91, p. 16) and in another part of the same text it is described that the digital development is happening in a "furious pace and the speed is just increasing" (SOU 2015:91, p. 13). Overall in digitalization policy, the role of politics is described as a reaction to changes outside the control of politics, thus they call for societal adjustment in order to benefit maximally from digitalization.

Another characterization of the nature of digitalization is that it only brings good things. This positive connotation to digitalization is present in most digitalization policy and proposed measures are motivated by their ability to promote digitalization. For instance, two of the six strategic areas that the Commission on Digitalization outline are "Continuous government engagement to promote the digitalization of society" and "Infrastructure that promotes digitalization" (SOU 2015:91, p. 22). Worth noting, under these headlines are efforts to push the development of digitalization to move faster, indicating that the government in fact has the capacity to affect the development of digitalization and contradicts the notion that the development is uncontrollable by politics.

One 'problem' that the digitalization policy represents is related to the need to be *sustainable*, thus a key concept in digitalization policy. However, the concept of sustainability is used in several different (possibly conflicting) ways throughout the policy documents. In the Digitalization Strategy, the type of sustainability that is aim for range from economic growth to longevity and risk reduction, societal development, gender equality (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, pp. 8-9,13). This makes it hard to draw conclusions about how sustainability is understood, since it is used in so many different ways. It is almost like sustainability is used at any available opportunity to signal that the policy is responsible and/or working for long term goals.

Digitalization policy builds on the binary ideas that one is either part of the digital society or not, either has digital competence or not. One of the envisioned consequences of the digital accessibility policy is described as "positive social effects as more people are included in the digital society" (p. 125). This suggest that one is either part of digital society or not and that there is value added to society by those in digital society. Therefore, the binary construction of people into categories of those with digital competence and those without digital competence also has an indication that one is more preferred than the other. This binary construction is also present in the digital accessibility policy, but what separates it from digitalization policy overall is the connection between this dichotomy the category the *disabled people*. The policies are said to especially aid people with disabilities, constructing a separate group. It should be mentioned that in the Digitalization Strategy, digital competence is partly defined as everyone "having the ability to follow and participate in the digital development *based on their prerequisites*" (cursive not in original) (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 12). This can be interpreted as a possibility of there being different kinds of participation in digital society due people having different preconditions, which somewhat contradicts the dichotomy of either participation or non-participation.

The ways in which the policies suggest that people become digitally competent, as a way to be included in digital society, is to offer universally formed and flexible solutions and to make efforts in the education system to increase digital competence (Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017, p. 13). These solutions rely for their success on people seeking out offered ways to digital competence. Under a neoliberal rationality, this is expected to happen so as long as it is rational of an economic actor to do (Brown, 2006, p. 694). This desired behavior of citizens has characteristics of the ideal neoliberal citizen, as they include being capable of calculating danger (in this case of being digitally excluded) and being active, rational economic actor (Woolford & Nelund, 2013, p. 304).

In an official government report from 2016 new forms of incentives in a digitalized world are discussed (SOU 2016:89, 2016). The report makes the argument that digitalization "means a need for development of governmental interventions in a digital world to include the possibilities for behavioral changes that digitalization gives." (SOU 2016:89, p. 147). The report continues to describe that such new forms of governmental incentives for behavioral changes include nudging, which is described as pushing people or businesses to make desired choices by presenting them in a certain way, as well as developing new forms of incentives (economic or inspirational) in order to reach important societal goals (SOU 2016:89, p. 147). The logic behind this kind of intervention is that setting desired behaviour will involve people in self-regulation, in other words a form of 'government at a distance' rule associated with neoliberalism (Bacchi, 2009, p. 29).

6.3 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ´problem´ be thought about differently?

The fourth question in the WPR approach offers opportunity to think outside the scope of how policies frame problems and identify ways in which the problem representations limit what is thinkable (Bacchi, 2009, p. 12).

The central goal is in Swedish digitalization policy is formulated as "Sweden will be the best in the world at using the possibilities of digitalization". Under section 6.1 in the analysis, it was found that the central 'problem' facing digitalization policy is represented as a risk of Sweden not being globally competitive. The conclusion was made that this is a logical goal to have given a neoliberal governmentality, giving legitimacy to efforts that prioritize market concerns over other type of concerns. Brown makes the argument that the "saturation of the state, political culture, and the social with market rationality effectively strips commitments to political democracy from governance concerns and political culture." (Brown, 2006, p. 694). Thus, another governmental rationality might instead put questions of equality or democracy at the forefront and formulate problem representation based on them.

The problem representation in digitalization policy presents digitalization as an external force (see section 6.2), limiting the possibility to question the role of the government in the effects resulting from digitalization, digital exclusion being one of them. At the same time, digitalization policy aims to promote the spread and increase the speed of digitalization as it is thought to be good for society. Even if there is little possibility of the government to completely control the spread of digitalization, there are reasonably some things that is within the reach of government's authority, especially if there are ways to push digitalization further. The policy discourse fails to problematize the potentially excluding effects this might have for those who are, or risk becoming, digitally excluded.

The analysis in section 6.2 found that in digitalization policy, there is a perception based on neoliberal rationality that that everyone can and want to become digital as people act in their own self-interest as rational economic actors. This limits what can be done about digital exclusion as by this logic, all the government should do is offer options for people to become digitally competent and the problem of digital exclusion will be solved. Suggesting that interventions are needed that would treat people are not always acting like rational economic actors would be outside the realm of this rationality.

The binary division found under section 6.2 that one is ether part of digital society or not fails to capture the complexity of reality. Another way of understanding digital inclusion would be to see it as types of inclusion. The potential in talking about types of inclusion could be that it adds information about how digital inclusion is operationalized, it could bring transparency the reality of how digital inclusion in Sweden looks and what kind of digital inclusion is expected of people by the government.

6.4   What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

The fifth question of the WPR approach can be seen as a continuation of the second question. Here, questions are asked about the unequal effects of problem representations on some groups in relation to other groups (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15). Bacchi lists three interconnected kinds of effects: discursive, subjectification and lived effects.

The analysis in section 6.2 showed that the nature of digitalization is represented as an external force that is transforming society. The idea that this problem conceptualization of the nature of digitalization can have limiting effects was already discussed in section 6.3. The WPR approach talks about such mechanisms as discursive effect, as the framing of a problem representation in a certain way can limit what is possible to think of as solutions (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16).

The analysis under section 6.2 found that there is a binary conceptualization of digital competence and participation in digitalization policy which means that people are either understood as being included in digital society or not included in digital society, what in a WPR approach can be described as a subjectification effect of making two subject positions available (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16). The analysis in the section 6.2 also showed that the central problem representation in digitalization policy is Sweden risking losing its forefront position on digitalization in the international arena. The policy also makes clear that do not have digital competence constitute a problem for this: "[h]aving the ability to live digitally is crucial in order for Swedish society to transform to a digital society" (Digitaliseringsrådet, 2018, p. 12). It is also descried that because it is costly to maintain two parallel systems, everyone must become comfortable with digital society (Digitaliseringsrådet, 2018, p. 7). Thereby the policy not only makes two subject positions available, but also signaling that one's behavior is preferred over the other. Framing digitally excluded people as a problem for societal development as a *dividing practice*. Dividing practices are caused by a subjectification of some people in different groups in opposition to each other, for example the employed *versus* the un-employed (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16). Bacchi refers to Foucault's argument on the use of such dividing practices, the argument being that "this stigmatization of targeted minorities serves a useful governmental purpose, indicating and encouraging desired behavior among the majority" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16). Following this argument, indicating that people not being digital are a problem could be a way to further indicate to the general public that being digital is a desired behavior. Again, this can be related to the characteristics of a neoliberal governmentality, as this rationality is characterized by domination of market concerns and a belief that people are rational economic actors (Brown, 2006, p. 694).

7 Conclusion

In this paper, Carol Bacchi's *What's the problem represented to be*? approach has been used in combination with theory on neoliberal governmentality and citizenship. The purpose of this paper is to problematize Swedish digitalization policy, the problem representation within it and their implications, especially on digital exclusion. Further, special attention was put to analyze the possible influence of neoliberal rationality in digitalization policy. In what follows, the findings related to the two research questions will be summarized and suggestions for further research made.

Related to the first research question, the central problem representations found in digitalization policy were the threat of not having the conditions needed to be internationally competitive and society being unsustainable. The analysis found that digitalization is assumed to only bring good things and to be an external force outside the reach of politics. Further, the conclusion if drawn that this has limiting effects on what can be thought of as solutions to 'problems' represented in digitalization policy. Of particular interest for this paper, the analysis also shows that it limits what can be done about digital exclusion. The argument is also made that Swedish digitalization policy constructs a dichotomy where one is either part of digital society or not, and tries to steer people to become digital by in part describing non-participation as an obstacle for societal development.

As for the second research question, which can be seen as a sub-question to the first one, the analysis shows that digitalization policy is characterized by a pattern of neoliberal rationality. Support for this is found across digitalization policy. Further, the analysis found that neoliberal rationality in digitalization policy can have affect digital exclusion. For example, neoliberal rationality is dominated by market concerns and therefore when digitalization is thought of to be a way to international competitiveness, a lack of digital participation stands in the way of that. Digital exclusion then becomes a problem for the economy rather than, for example, a social problem. The conclusion is drawn that this can affect the way in which digital exclusion is treated. It must be mentioned that the WPR approach acknowledges the "simultaneous coexistence of various forms of rule, which are often hybrid" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7). In other words, simply because a pattern of neoliberal political rationality was found that does not mean there cannot also be other rationalities at play, nor is that meant to be the signaled as the logical deduction in this paper.

The analysis suggests that Swedish digitalization policy has elements that increase the ostracizing effects of digital exclusion by framing non-digital citizens as a reliability for society. At the same time, the digitalization policy promotes a faster digitalization, arguably risking increased digital exclusion. There is need for further research that questions the problematizations in digitalization policy, not

least given that previous research has shown negative effects on the well-being of people in digital exclusion (Hansen, et al., 2018; Schou & Hjelholt, 2018). Considered outside the limited scope of this paper, a more comprehensive study on problem representations in digitalization policy could include analysis of the lived effects it creates. Such research is needed to advance the knowledge about digital exclusion.

8   List of references

Bacchi, Carol, 2009. *Analyzing policy: What's the problem represented to be?.* s.l.:Pearson Education .

Bacchi, Carol & Susan Goodwin, 2016. *Poststructural Policy Analysis.* New York: Palgrave published by Springer Nature.

Bet. 2017/18:TU9, 2017. *It-politik,* Trafikutskottets betänkande.

Brown, Wendy, 2006. "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization". *Political Theory,* December, Volume 34, pp. 690-714.

Buffat, Aurélien., 2015. "Street-level bureaucracy and e-government". *Public Management Review,* Volume 17, pp. 149-161.

Digitaliseringsrådet, 2018. *En lägesbild av digital kompetens ,* s.l.: Digitaliseringsrådet.

Digitaliseringsstrategin, 2017. *För ett hållbart Sverige - en digitaliseringsstrategi,* s.l.: Regeringskansliet.

Directive (EU) 2016/2102, *Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 October 2016 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies*
Available at: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/2102/oj
[Accessed 13 08 2019].

Ds 2017:60, *Genomförande av webtillgänglighetsdirektivet,* Finansdepartementet.

Hall, Patrik, 2008. "Throwing discourses in the garbage can: The case of Swedish ICT policy". *Critical Policy Analysis.* Volume 2, No. 1, pp. 25-44.

Hall, Patrik & Karl Löfgren, 2004. "The rise and decline of a visionary policy: Swedish ICT-policy in retrospect".. *Information Polity: The International Journal of Government & Democracy in the Information Age.,* Volume 9, pp. 149-165.

Hansen, Hans-Tore, Kjell Lundberg & Liv Johanne Syltevik, 2018. "Digitalization, Street-Level Bureaucracy and Welfare Users' Experiences". *Social Policy & Administration.* January*,* Volume 52, No. 1, pp. 67-90.

Helsper, E. J. & Reisdorf, B. C., 2017. "The emergence of a "digital underclass" in Great Britain and Sweden: Changing reasons for digital exclusion". *New Media and Society,* August, Volume 19, pp. 1253-1270.

Internetstiftelsen, 2018. *Svenskarna och internet 2018,* [Online]
Available at: https://internetstiftelsen.se/docs/Svenskarna_och_internet_2018.pdf
[Accessed 13 08 2019].

Jansson, Gabriella & Gissur Ó Erlingsson, 2014. "More E-Government, Less Street-Level Bureaucracy? On Legitimacy and the Human Side of Public Administration". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics,* Volume 11, No. 3, pp. 291-308.

Myndigheten för digital förvaltning 1 = webpage for the Agency for Digital Government [Online]
Available at: https://www.digg.se/digitalisering-av-offentlig-sektor/den-digitala-forvaltningen
[Accessed 13 08 2019].

Myndigheten för digital förvaltning 2, 2019, *Remisspromemoria om förslag till föreskrifter om tillgänglighet till digital offentlig service* [Online]
Available at: https://www.digg.se/globalassets/remisser/remisspromemoria-om-forslag-till-foreskrifter-om-tillganglighet-till-digital-offentlig-service.pdf
[Accessed 13 08 2019].

Olsson, Tobias, Ulli Samuelsson & Dino Viscovi, 2019. "At risk of exclusion? Degrees of ICT access and literacy among senior citizens". *Information, Communication & Society,* Volume 22, pp. 55-72.

Regeringskansliet, 2018. *För ett hållbart Sverige - en digitaliseringsstrategi* [Online]
Available at:
https://www.regeringen.se/49adea/contentassets/5429e024be6847fc907b786ab954228f/digitaliseringsstrategin_slutlig_170518-2.pdf
[Accessed 13 08 2019].

Riksdagsförvaltningen, webpage of the parliament [Online]
Available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/utskotten-eu-namnden/trafikutskottet/?utskstatus=justeringar&committeeCasesPage=1
[Accessed 13 08 2019].

Schou, Jannick & Morten Hjelholt, 2018. *Digitalization and Public Sector Transformation.* Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.

SFS 2018:1937, n.d. *Lag om tillgänglighet till digital offentlig service.*

SFS 2018:1938, n.d. *Förordning om tillgänglighet till digital offentlig service.*

Skatteverket 2017, *Verksamhetsplan för Skatteverket 2018-2020* [Online]
Available at:
https://www.skatteverket.se/download/18.4a4d586616058d860bc4f4e/1515598042648/verksamhetplan-for-skatteverket-2018-2020-skv190-utgava22.pdf
[Accessed 14 08 2019].

Skr. 2017/18:47, 2017. *Hur Sverige blir bäst i världen på att använda digitaliseringens möjligheter – en skrivelse om politikens inriktning,* Regeringens skrivelse.

SOU 2015:91. *Digitaliseringens transformerande kraft - vägval för framtiden,* Digitaliseringskommissionen.

SOU 2016:89. *För digitalisering i tiden,* Digitaliseringskommissionen

Woolford, Andrew & Amanda Nelund, 2013. "The Responsibilities of the Poor: Performing Neoliberal Citizenship within the Bureaucratic Field". *Social Service Review,* June, Volume 87, pp. 292-318.